

Chapter 74

ONE OF THE SOUVENIRS OF THE DUC D'ANJOU.

Henri, as he entered, could hear the hateful laugh of the prince, but he had not lived enough with him to know the danger that always lurked in his laugh. Besides, he could not suspect the subject of conversation, and no one dared to tell him in the duke's presence. Besides, the duke, who had already settled his plan, kept Henri near him until all the other officers were gone. He then changed the distribution of the posts. Henri had established his quarters in that house, and had intended to send the ensign to a post near the river, but the duke now took Henri's place, and sent him where the ensign was to have been. Henri was not astonished, for the river was an important point. Before going, however, he wished to speak to the ensign, and recommend to his care the two people under his protection, and whom he was forced for the time to abandon. But at the first word that Henri began to speak to him the duke interposed. "Secrets?" said he, with his peculiar smile.

The ensign had understood, when too late, the fault he had been guilty of.

"No, monseigneur," replied he, "M. le Comte was only asking me how much powder we had left fit to use."

The answer had two aims; the first to turn away the duke's suspicions, if he had any; and the second to let Du Bouchage know that he could

count on a friend in him.

"Ah!" said the duke, forced to seem to believe what he was told. And as he turned to the door the ensign whispered to Henri, "The prince knows you are escorting some one."

Henri started, but it was too late. The duke remarked the start, and, as if to assure himself that his orders were executed, proposed to Henri to accompany him to his post, which he was forced to accede to.

Henri wished to warn Remy to be on his guard, but it was impossible; all he could do was to say to the ensign:

"Watch well over the powder; watch it as I would myself, will you not?"

"Yes, M. le Comte," replied the young man.

On the way the duke said to Du Bouchage, "Where is this powder that you speak of?"

"In the house we have just left, your highness."

"Oh! be easy, then, Du Bouchage; I know too well the importance of such an article, in our situation, to neglect it. I will watch over it myself."

They said no more until they arrived, when the duke, after giving Henri

many charges not to quit his post, returned. He found Aurilly wrapped in an officer's cloak, sleeping on one of the seats in the dining-room. The duke woke him. "Come," said he.

"Yes, monseigneur."

"Do you know what I mean?"

"Yes! the unknown lady--the relation of M. du Bouchage."

"Good; I see that the faro of Brussels and the beer of Louvain have not clouded your intellects."

"Oh! no, monseigneur, I am more ingenious than ever."

"Then call up all your imagination, and guess."

"Well! I guess that your highness is envious."

"Ah! parbleu, I always am; but what is it about just now?"

"You wish to know who is the brave creature who has followed the MM. de Joyeuse through fire and water?"

"You have just hit it, 'per mille pericula Martis!' as Margot would say.

Apropos, have you written to her, Aurilly?"

"To whom, monseigneur?"

"To my sister Margot."

"Had I to write to her?"

"Certainly."

"About what?"

"To tell her that we are beaten--ruined, and that she must look out for herself; for that Spain, disembarassed of me in the north, will fall on her in the south."

"Ah! true."

"You have not written?"

"No, monseigneur."

"You slept?"

"Yes, I confess it; but even if I had thought of it, with what could I have written? I have here neither pen, paper, nor ink."

"Well, seek. 'Quare et invenies,' as it is written."

"How in the devil's name am I to find it in the hut of a peasant, who probably did not know how to write?"

"Seek, stupid! if you do not find that, you will find--"

"What?"

"Something else."

"Oh! fool that I was," cried Aurilly. "Your highness is right: I am stupid; but I am very sleepy, you see."

"Well, keep awake for a little while, and, since you have not written, I will write; only go and seek what is necessary. Go, Aurilly, and do not come back till you have found it; I will remain here."

"I go, monseigneur."

"And if, in your researches, you discover that the house is picturesque--you know how I admire Flemish interiors, Aurilly."

"Yes, monseigneur."

"Well! call me."

"Immediately, monseigneur; be easy."

Aurilly rose, and, with a step light as a bird, went up the staircase.

In five minutes he returned to his master.

"Well?" asked he.

"Well, monseigneur, if I may believe appearances, the house is devilishly picturesque."

"How so?"

"Peste! monseigneur; because one cannot get in to look."

"What do you mean?"

"I mean that it is guarded by a dragon."

"What foolish joke is this?"

"Oh! monseigneur, it is unluckily not a foolish joke, but a sad truth. The treasure is on the first floor, in a room in which I can see light through the door."

"Well?"

"Well! before this door lies a man, wrapped in a gray cloak."

"Oh, oh! M. du Bouchage puts a gendarme at the door of his mistress."

"It is not a gendarme, monseigneur, but some attendant of the lady's or of the count's."--"What kind of a man?"

"Monseigneur, it was impossible to see his face; but I could perfectly see a large Flemish knife in his belt, and his hand, on it."

"It is amusing; go and waken the fellow."

"Oh, no, monseigneur."

"Why not?"

"Why, without counting the knife, I do not wish to amuse myself with making a mortal enemy of MM. de Joyeuse, who stand so well at court. If you had been king of this country, it might have passed; but now you must be gracious, above all with those who saved you, and Joyeuse did save you. They will say so, whether you do or not."--"You are right, Aurilly, and yet--and yet--"

"I understand. Your highness has not seen a woman's face for fifteen mortal days. I do not speak of the kind of animals who live here; they are males and females, but do not deserve to be called men and women."

"I must see this lady, Aurilly."

"Well, monseigneur, you may see her; but not through the door."

"So be it; then I will see her through the window."

"Ah! that is a good idea, and I will go and look for a ladder for you."

Aurilly glided into the courtyard, and under a shed found what he wanted. He maneuvered it among horses and men so skillfully as to wake no one, and placed it in the street against the outer wall. It was necessary to be a prince, and sovereignly disdainful of vulgar scruples, to dare, in the presence of the sentinel, who walked up and down before the door, to accomplish an action so audaciously insulting to Du Bouchage. Aurilly felt this, and pointed out the sentinel, who, now observing, called out, "Qui vive!"

Francois shrugged his shoulders and walked up to him.

"My friend," said he, "this place is the most elevated spot in the village, is it not?"

"Yes, monseigneur," said the man, recognizing him, "and were it not for those lime trees, we could see over a great part of the country."

"I thought so; and therefore I have brought a ladder," said the duke.

"Go up, Aurilly, or rather, let me go up; I will see for myself."

"Where shall I place it?" said the hypocritical follower.

"Oh, anywhere; against that wall, for instance."

The sentinel walked off, and the duke mounted the ladder, Aurilly standing at the foot.

The room in which Henri had placed Diana was matted, and had a large oaken bed with serge curtains, a table, and a few chairs.

Diana, whose heart seemed relieved from an enormous weight since she had heard the false news of the duke's death, had, almost for the first time since her father's death, eaten something more substantial than bread, and drunk a little wine. After this she grew sleepy, and Remy had left her, and was sleeping outside her door, not from any suspicion, but because such had been his habit ever since they had left Paris.

Diana herself slept with her elbow on the table and her head leaning on her hand. A little lamp burned on the table, and all looked peaceful here, where such tempestuous emotions had raged and would soon again. In

the glass sparkled the Rhine wine, scarcely touched by Diana. She, with her eyes closed, her eyelids veined with azure, her mouth slightly opened, her hair thrown back, looked like a sublime vision to the eyes that were violating the sanctity of her retreat. The duke, on perceiving her, could hardly repress his admiration, and leaned over to examine every detail of her ideal beauty. But all at once he frowned, and came down two or three steps with a kind of nervous precipitation, and leaning back against the wall, crossed his arms and appeared to reflect.

Aurilly watched him as he stood there, with a dreamy air, like a man trying to recall some old souvenir. After a few minutes he remounted and looked in again, but Aurilly called out, "Quick! quick! monseigneur, come down; I hear steps."

The duke came down, but slowly.

"It was time," said Aurilly.

"Whence comes the sound?"

"From there," said Aurilly, pointing to a dark street. "But the sound has ceased; it must have been some spy watching us."

"Remove the ladder."

Aurilly obeyed; however, no one appeared, and they heard no more noise.

"Well, monseigneur, is she beautiful?" said Aurilly.

"Very beautiful," said the prince, abstractedly.

"What makes you sad then? Did she see you?"

"No, she was asleep."

"Then what is the matter?"

"Aurilly, it is strange, but I have seen that woman somewhere."

"You recognized her, then?"

"No, I could not think of her name; but her face gave me a fearful shock. I cannot tell how it is; but I believe I did wrong to look."

"However, just on account of the impression she has made on you, we must find out who she is."

"Certainly we must."

"Seek well in your memory, monseigneur; is it at court you have seen her?"

"No, I think not."

"In France, Navarre, Flanders?"

"No."

"A Spaniard perhaps."

"I do not think so."

"An English lady, one of Queen Elizabeth's?"

"No, I seem to know her more intimately, and that she appeared to me in some terrible scene."

"Then you would have recognized her at once; you have not seen many such scenes."

"Do you think so?" said the duke, with a gloomy smile. "Now," continued he, "that I am sufficiently master of myself to analyze my sensations, I feel that this woman is beautiful, but with the beauty of death; beautiful as a shade, as a figure in a dream; and I have had two or three frightful dreams in my life, which left me cold at the heart. Well, now I am sure that it was in one of those dreams that I saw that woman."

"Your highness is not generally so susceptible, and but that I believe that we are watched from that street, I would mount in my turn and look."

"Ma foi! you are right, Aurilly; what does it matter whether we are watched or not? Go up and look."

Aurilly made a move forward to obey, when a hasty step was heard, and Henri's voice, crying, "Monseigneur!"

"You here!" said the duke, while Aurilly bounded back to his side; "you here, comte?--on what pretext have you quitted your post?"

"Monseigneur," replied Henri, firmly, "your highness can punish me, if you think proper: meanwhile, my duty was to come here, and I came."

The duke glanced toward the window. "Your duty, comte? Explain that to me," said he.

"Monseigneur, horsemen have been seen on the Spanish side of the river, and we do not know if they are friends or enemies."

"Numerous?" asked the duke anxiously.

"Very numerous, monseigneur."

"Well, comte, no false bravery: you will do well to return. Awake the gendarmes and let us decamp; it will be the most prudent plan."

"Doubtless, monseigneur; but it will be urgent, I think, to warn my brother."

"Two men will do."

"Then I will go with a gendarme."

"No, no, Du Bouchage; you must come with us. Pestel! it is not at such a moment that I can separate from a defender like you."

"When does your highness set out?" said Henri, bowing.

"At once, comte."

"Hola! some one," cried Henri.

The young ensign came out immediately from the dark street. Henri gave his orders, and soon the place was filled with gendarmes preparing for departure. Among them the duke talked with his officers.

"Gentlemen," said he, "the Prince of Orange is pursuing me, it seems; but it is not proper that a son of France should be taken prisoner. Let us, therefore, yield to numbers, and fall back upon Brussels. I shall be sure of life and liberty while I remain among you."

Then, turning to Aurilly, "You remain," said he. "This woman cannot follow us. Joyeuse will not dare to bring her with him in my presence. Besides, we are not going to a ball, and the race we shall run would fatigue a lady."

"Where are you going, monseigneur?"

"To France. I think my business is over here."

"But to what part of France. Does monseigneur think it prudent to return to court?"

"No; I shall stop at one of my castles, Chateau-Thierry, for example."

"Has your highness decided on that?"

"Yes; Chateau-Thierry suits me in all respects; it is a good distance from Paris, about twenty-eight leagues, and I can watch from thence MM. de Guise, who are half the year at Soissons. So bring the beautiful unknown to Chateau-Thierry."

"But, monsieur, perhaps she will not be brought."

"Nonsense; since Du Bouchage accompanies me, and she follows him, it will be quite natural."

"But she may wish to go somewhere else, if she sees that I wish to bring her to you."

"But I repeat that it is not to me that you are to bring her, but to the comte. Really, one would think it was the first time you had aided me in such circumstances. Have you money?"

"I have the two rouleaux of gold that you gave me when you left the camp."

"Well, by any and every method, bring me the lady to Chateau-Thierry; perhaps when I see her nearer I shall recognize her."

"And the man also?"

"Yes; if he is not troublesome."

"But if he is?"

"Do with him what you would do with a stone which is in your way--throw it away."

"Good, monseigneur."

While the two conspirators formed their plans, Henri went up and woke Remy. He knocked at the door in a peculiar fashion, and it was almost immediately opened by Diana. Behind Remy she perceived Henri.

"Good-evening, monsieur," said she, with a smile which had long been foreign to her face.

"Oh! pardon me, madame," said Henri, "for intruding on you; but I come to make my adieux."

"Your adieux, comte; you are going?"

"To France, madame."

"And you leave us?"

"I am forced to do so; my duty is to obey the prince."

"The prince; is there a prince here?" asked Remy.

"Yes, M. le Duc d'Anjou, who was believed dead, and who has been miraculously saved, has joined us."

Diana uttered a terrible cry, and Remy turned as pale as though he had been suddenly struck with death.

"The Duc d'Anjou living!" cried Diana. "The Duc d'Anjou here?"

"Had he not been here, madame, and ordered me to follow him, I should have accompanied you to the convent into which you tell me you are about to retire."

"Yes, yes," said Remy; "the convent;" and he put his finger on his lip.

"I would have accompanied you the more willingly, madame," said Henri; "because I fear that you may be annoyed by the prince's people."--"How so?"

"Yes; I believe that he knows there is a lady here, and he thinks that she is a friend of mine."

"And what makes you think so?"

"Our young ensign saw him place a ladder against this window and look in."

"Oh!" cried Diana; "mon Dieu! mon Dieu!"

"Reassure yourself, madame! he heard him say that he did not know you. Besides, the duke is going to set off at once--in a quarter of an hour you will be alone and free. Permit me to salute you with respect, and to tell you once more, that till my last sigh, my heart will beat for you and with you. Adieu, madame, adieu." And the comte, bowing, took two steps back.

"No, no!" cried Diana, wildly, "no, God cannot have done this! He cannot have brought this man to life again; no, monsieur, you must be wrong, he is dead."

At this moment, as if in reply, the duke's voice was heard calling from below:

"Comte, we are waiting for you."

"You hear him, madame," said Henri. "For the last time, adieu."

And pressing Remy's hand, he flew down the staircase. Diana approached the window trembling, and with a convulsive shudder, like the bird fascinated by the serpent of the Antilles. She saw the duke on horseback, and the light of the torches held by the gendarmes fell on

his face.

"Oh! he lives! the demon lives!" murmured she; "and we must live also.

He is setting out for France; so be it, Remy, we also must go to France."